

THE AWARD of PARIS

By William Wallace Whitelock

YES, you're right, everybody has a romance, if you can only get at it," said the Captain, smiling. "The fellows whose romances have turned out happily don't mind so much talking about them; but it's the other sort that are the most interesting. I can tell you only one of the uninteresting romances; but if you'd like to hear how I won my wife, or rather how I re-won her, I'll tell you.

"The two most beautiful women I've had to do with in my life are my sister and my wife. They're still beautiful in my eyes; but thirty-five years ago they were beautiful in everybody's eyes. To walk along the street with one of them was a trial; but to have both of them in tow was to run the risk of being mobbed by the curious. They were as different as day and night; but it was nip and tuck between them. At least, it was nip and tuck after they became acquainted; but as they didn't become acquainted until the day before my marriage, there was a considerable period during which each of them had the satisfaction of thinking herself the most beautiful woman in the world.

"It happened this way. I met the girl who became my wife just after I got out of the naval academy, and I tell you I lost no time in getting engaged to her. But as we didn't intend marrying before I returned from my initial cruise, we decided to keep the engagement secret for awhile. So, none of my family even knew of her existence. And then, before I had a chance to tell them, there came one of those idiotic 'lovers' quarrels which wreck so many lives, and I woke up to find myself unengaged. I hate to think about that time even now, I was in such a desperate state of mind. It was a foolish quarrel; but the estrangement seemed none the less final. I was too proud, or thought myself too proud, to write to her, and for three weeks I neither saw nor heard anything of her. Then, all of a sudden—but that would be to anticipate.

"Quite unexpectedly came an order from the department to report for sea service at San Francisco within ten days; so there remained just time for me to get things in order and make a bee-line for the Coast; for, you see, it took longer to cross the continent in those days than it does now. When I'd be back was a question—certainly not in three years, at the shortest. And in three years so much can happen! The night before I was to leave for the West, my sister was coming down from Boston to bid me good-by, and she had written me to meet her upon her arrival in New-York in the evening. As it happened, however, one of my classmates, who had resigned just after graduation, was living at Stamford, thirty miles from New-York, and I decided to run out there and dine with him, and then surprise my sister by meeting her on the arrival of the train at that point.

"Everything went according to the program, and at a quarter to ten I was standing on the station platform waiting for the Boston Express to come along. Suddenly, to my surprise, a fellow came up whom I hadn't seen in five years, and we stood there talking until the whistle of the train informed us it was coming. Thirty years ago, you know, trains were fonder of whistling than they are now. Here came the great, throbbing, glowing monster toward us out of the night, and, as I watched the headlight grow bigger, a whimsical idea struck me.

"Look here, Frank," I said to my friend, "I'll make a bet with you. You see that train coming toward us? Well, I'll bet you a pair of field-glasses that I'll walk right up to the prettiest girl in the parlor car and kiss her without even saying by your leave. What do you say?"

"Well," said Frank, laughing, "that sounds pretty bold. But how are we to decide which is the prettiest girl?"

"Oh, I'll leave that to you. Just walk through the

car and stop opposite the girl you think the prettiest, and I'll do the rest."

"Very well, I'll take you," said Frank.

"At that moment the train came to a standstill, and we sprang up the steps of the parlor car, with Frank in the lead. I was not in the least concerned for my field-glasses, as I knew it was practically certain that he would select my sister as the prettiest girl.

"Into the car stalked Frank, and I followed him more slowly, so as to allow him a lead of ten feet or

the cushion, and her eyes fixed on space, lost in dreams. In the artificial light her face seemed ethereal, almost preternaturally beautiful, in its pale regularity.

"With a confident smile, I followed Frank down the aisle, as he slowly advanced, turning his head from side to side to scrutinize each woman in his course. Suddenly he perceived my sister, and with a start came to a halt and stood gazing at her. From that moment he had eyes for no other woman in the car, and that state has continued to the present day. But at the moment he recovered himself, and quickly advanced till beside my sister's chair, when he again paused, as a signal to me, and forthwith passed on toward the end of the car.

"I had won my bet. Slowly I advanced, inwardly chuckling at thought of Frank's surprise when he should see me bend over and kiss this beautiful woman. But, being her brother, sight of her beauty had not incapacitated me for noticing other people, and as I advanced I let my eyes rove over the passengers on each side. But a surprise was in store for me, too.

"Suddenly I caught my breath and came to a standstill, my heart ceasing to beat, and every drop of blood in my veins seeming to turn to ice. There before me, in the chair across the aisle from my sister, sat the woman whose face was indelibly stamped upon my mind, and who never had been absent from my thoughts for one instant since our first meeting. She was reading, and had not noticed me. What strange turn of fortune had thus brought together these two women, each of whom was so entwined with my life? Often, since, I have pondered the question; but at the moment I did not stop to concern myself with riddles. My one thought was: 'Yonder sits the woman whom I love and without whom life is not worth living.' That was sufficient for me.

"Like a flash this thought passed through my mind; the next moment I was advancing toward where she was sitting. The train was now again under way, and the only sound was the rattle of the wheels. When I was within one seat of where my sister was sitting she caught sight of me, and sat up, with an exclamation of surprise. This, perhaps, attracted the attention of her neighbor, or was it

that she felt my presence? At all events, just as I reached her side, she looked up and her eyes met mine. For a moment she gazed at me, absently, as though I had been but a dream figure; then a wave of color rushed to her face and flooded it. I, too, hesitated, but only for an instant. Then, quickly stooping, I leaned over and kissed her fairly on the lips.

"Oh!" I heard my sister exclaim; but that was all. I straightened up and waited to see what would be the result of my audacity. Those deep, brown eyes were fixed on my face, and in their depths I saw—for a moment I was in doubt what I saw; then it rose and overflowed her eyes and broke her face into dimples, and I knew it was a smile. My boldness had stormed the fortress.

"Well, I had lost my bet after all; but I had won something infinitely better, I think, than a pair of field glasses. Nor was I the only one of that party who, like Saul, had found better than he had gone out to seek. An hour later, as my sister, my fiancée, Frank and myself were driving down town in a four-wheeler from the Grand Central Station, during a silence between my companion and myself I overheard Frank assuring my sister that not for one moment had he hesitated in awarding the prize of beauty to her in the train. This was pretty good, I thought, as I could have taken oath that he had failed to notice the girl sitting across the aisle from her, and who was now sitting beside me. However, love is blind, and from a blind man one mustn't expect too great discrimination."



A Wave of Color Rushed to Her Face and Flooded It

more. I quickly cast my eyes over the passengers. Ah! there was my sister in the center of the car, half-reclining in her chair, with her head laid back against

LOCOED

By Frank Putnam

I'm restless-like, and the town's roar jars
On my nerves, and I dread the uneasy night,
And I fume and smother in crowded cars,
And my pipe won't draw nor my food taste right,
And my desk fades out in a curious way,
Right in the middle of the afternoon,
And I wake up back in an old-time June—
Barefoot—night—and the cattle at the bars.

Was that the tinkle of the telephone,
Or old Spot's bell in the Spring Creek woods?
Something or other far, faint and fine,
An echo, maybe, of the low, sweet tone
Of a wood-bird calling to her mate to come:
Or it might be nothing but the ceaseless hum
Of the tireless wheels of the toil-mad town.

Bah! Dreams, mere dreams, and the real thing's here,
Where the men and the money are right to my hand!
* * * But, say, sometimes, when I feel this way,
Locoed-like, as I am to-day,
And as near plumb crazy as the law allows,
For a nickle I'd chuck up the whole blamed thing
And go out and eat grass with the cows.